

**TESTIMONY OF BENJAMIN WHITE SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS AND HIGHER EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON FEBRUARY 15, 2017**

H.B. No. 7027 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 2019

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and members of the Committee, I currently attend the University of Connecticut where I am a member of the Collegiate Health Service Corps (CHSC) program with Eastern CT Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Inc. The CHSC provides with resources and hands on experiences to explore different health careers. Through the CHSC, I have learned and practiced valuable skills such as leadership, volunteer service and cultural sensitivity. Without the CHSC, I wouldn't have been able to obtain CPR certification or implement meaningful service learning projects in my community. I am a resident of Braintree, MA, but I consider the community around UConn Storrs a second home.

The CT AHEC Program or network directly supports primary care workforce development in the state by "connecting students to careers in health, professionals to communities, and communities to better health." Funded since 1997, the CT AHEC Program provides state-wide services to more than 10,000 residents, annually (<http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/ct-ahec.html>). As the demographics of the state continue to change, the primary care workforce must expand and respond to meet those changes. The CT AHEC Program is an invaluable resource to address these challenges at both a state and local level.

The CT AHEC Program utilizes federal, state and private funding to support:

- Inter-professional education and community based training programs for health professions students
- Promotion and retention of primary care providers in collaboration with state agencies
- Cultural competence and medical interpreting training to health professionals and trainees
- Dissemination and recruitment of health professional trainees in the National Health Service Corps
- Continuing medical education programs for public health and health care professionals
- pipeline educational programs to raise awareness of health careers for pre-health professions learners

Supported by federal, state and private dollars, the CT AHEC Program Office is located at UConn Health in Farmington, CT. The 4 regional AHEC Centers in collaboration with the Program Office extend UConn Health's reach state-wide. The AHEC Program responds to local needs and partnerships that address community health needs which include oral health, veteran's mental health, youth mental health first aid, teen health literacy, homeless and migrant farm worker access to health care.

I have been fortunate to be part of this program which allowed me to further my life and educational experiences. My work over the past three years with CHSC has given me insights into the multitude of small issues that make it incredibly difficult for these underserved communities to live healthy lives. As someone going on to attain a PhD, I have never seen a study mention that its participants may not be able to bus to the medical center or that they use computers at the library since they cannot afford their own. Ultimately, one of the greatest issues in both practice and research in healthcare is a lack of individual understanding. As I continue on into the next stage of my life, CHSC has played a pivotal role in making me understand that we need these ground level programs that focus on not only training health professionals, but also tie our resources directly to the community. There is no cookie-cutter solution to these health problems, and programs like AHEC are the leading edge in directing communities and healthcare providers towards realistic solutions, whether it be by mobilizing students or making us more aware of the multitude of services that are currently underutilized.

Eastern CT Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Inc. is part of the Connecticut AHEC Network (CTAHEC) and was established in 1997. It provides its services and support in New London County and Windham County.

I personally feel that if CT AHEC Network is not restored to its funding level of \$406,723 that it would be very detrimental to the community. The proposed budget cut for Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019 to \$378,349 will directly hinder the great work that CTAHEC has done and continues to do daily. I cannot express the consequences and unreplaceable void this would leave for the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Below is my contact information for your convenience.

Benjamin, White

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